



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

The
American Historical Review

HISTORY AND DEMOCRACY

MANY careful students of modern life assert that they discern in society a widespread discontent with the results of historical study as pursued to-day. Assuming this feeling to be well founded, they attribute the supposed feebleness of contemporary historical writing to these causes: an unscientific method, the necessary complexity of the subject, and the incapacity of democracies to develop the imagination, either scientific or literary. The truth or untruth of this charge may well engage the attention, both of those who have devoted their lives to historical study and of those who scan the past either for a better understanding of present conditions or for guidance in the future. It may be impossible to refute it absolutely, for we shall be known as we are only after a lapse of time sufficient to secure historical perspective, but there are many weighty considerations which seem to make its validity very doubtful.

The real merit of the evolutionary philosophy which has captured the thought of our day lies in the fact that it has made possible a science of the humanities. Claiming to distinguish sharply between the knowable and the unknowable, the physical and the metaphysical, the natural and the supernatural, it set to work on the inductive method to examine knowable, physical, and natural phenomena by the senses, and to generalize about them by the reason. As is usually the case, it was the unexpected which happened. The so-called laws of nature demanded for their apprehension not merely a notion of uniformity, but a conception of unity so far-reaching that its limits have not yet been found, while at the same time the fundamental ideas of the physical philosopher, without which his theories are vain and his reason misleading, turn out to be metaphysical in the highest

degree, as, for example, the vortex theory in physics, the stereometric chemistry, the reversing dimension in mathematics, and most of the very recent foundation concepts of biology.

On the other hand, identical methods of investigation concerning man, both the race and the individual, began to display possibilities in the orderly arrangement of our knowledge concerning his motives and conduct of which we had hitherto not dreamed. The chance element in human affairs dependent upon the supposed fickleness of the personal will seemed to grow less and less important; and finally the antinomy between liberty and necessity, freedom of choice and the fixity of scientific fact, has ceased to engage the attention of moralists and historians to the exclusion of other important considerations. In the study of the race as a whole, and even of the individual, they have found a broad field within which to work unhampered by undue regard for metaphysics. Paradoxical as it appears, the sciences of man's nature have for a generation past been growing more and more physical, just in proportion as the other sciences have been growing metaphysical; until while the former do not as yet claim to be exact, and do not venture the test of prediction, they nevertheless assert that they are sciences real and practical.

While this is true in a very high degree of jurisprudence, of political science, and of sociology, it is especially true of history. The doctrine of the unity of history has not merely been rehabilitated, but it has been so emphasized that the consequences are simply revolutionary, scientific methods having by its means been introduced into a discipline hitherto venerated as the highest department of prose literature, to be sure, but esteemed by the great critics, and by mankind generally, as on the whole vague and imaginative, as being a picture of the writer's own mind rather than a presentation of facts in an external world, and of reliable deductions from them. Most of us have read with profound sympathy Kant's plaintive call, in view of "the circumstantiality of history as now written," for a "philosophical head deeply versed in history," to point out for posterity "what nations or governments may have performed or spoiled in a cosmopolitical view." The efforts made by such heads to prove and display the unity of history have resulted in just what he longed for,—short treatises on general history which fix with sufficient accuracy the real landmarks of all time, and exhibit them in their proper proportions as to the ascent of man "in a cosmopolitical view." This has not been done very successfully in Kant's own country; for the general histories undertaken or completed in Germany are

either laid out on a scale proportionate to the German mind and no other, or else, like Hegel's, they exhibit nature as having been solely concerned throughout the ages with a plan to bring forth in the fulness of time the Prussian monarchy and the German Empire. But the task of generalization has been done, and that successfully, both in England and in the United States; and, with some brilliancy, even in France, where a concept of that great nation as being, after all, but a single factor in the advance of civilization has finally been accepted. Doubtless the patriotism of any general historian will cause him vigorously to emphasize the importance of his own land in the comprehensive scheme, but to accept the doctrine of the unity of history is already to admit that no country is more than one wheel in the series which moves the hands on the dial-plate of human progress.

The croakers have been saying that indulgence in generalizations must necessarily destroy thoroughness in detail; and the effort is constantly making to discredit the new turn of historical studies by the prophecy that it must result in superficiality. Thus far, at least, the facts all point the other way. Thoroughness has increased in direct ratio with the expansion of the historical horizon. All the sciences of man, whether physical or ethical, have been advanced with a passionate zeal, equal to, if not greater than, that of investigators in the material world, and by the same methods as theirs. Anthropology, mythology, archæology, physical geography, philology, psychology, and all their sisters, each in its own subdivisions, have been attacking and pursuing their various problems by the inductive and comparative method, and with vastly inferior money resources have outstripped in the importance of their results the richly and even lavishly endowed natural sciences. If we remember that our grandfathers had no other general history than that of Rollin, written before the middle of the eighteenth century, and consequently knew the whole field of secular history as divided into Ancient or Græco-Roman, Mediæval, and Modern, each period separated from the other by a great chasm, we shall at once recollect that, thanks to the spade and the science of comparative philology, we have now in Prehistoric Archæology and in Ancient Oriental History two entirely new epochs in the story of man from which the most precious information as to his origin and early advances has been derived. At the same time we have laid the contemporary savage under contribution, and from him we have wrenched details for comparison with early institutions in regard to custom, myth, and social organization which seem likely to be of the first importance. The notion of

chasms has disappeared, and the continuity of history has been established.

But this is not all. Within the strictly limited field of history proper we have revolutionized the whole method of investigation in that we no longer study nations, but epochs. Middle-aged and older men will remember with some amusement the amazing historical charts which used to adorn the walls of schoolrooms, and resembled nothing so much as rainbow-colored rivers vaguely rising at the top, and wandering in viscid streams more or less vertically, according to the law of gravitation or the resistance of the medium, until absorbed one by the other, or lost in the ferule at the bottom. We rule our charts differently now; by straight horizontal lines, nearer or farther apart according to the period of general history with which we are concerned. The great stream is monotone, though not monotonous; and if it be but a single year that we study, we investigate it clear across, from where it scours the channel toward both shores, including even the annals of semi-civilized and barbarous peoples, so far as they seem to affect the current or the eddies. We have found the movement of the race more majestic than that of nations or individuals, the interest in man more intense than that in men or persons, and the development of civilization more instructive than the achievements of heroes. This is true, of course, not so much for the general reader as for students of history. The latter, speaking from their personal experiences, will probably agree that the tremendous revival of interest in history is not so much a revival of interest in historical narrative as in historical study. No university class-rooms are more thronged than those where instruction in history is given; and this is equally as true of those which are concerned with the minute, painstaking study of details in a short epoch as it is of those which seek to impart philosophical or general ideas of method, and stimulate to investigation by laying down broad principles of procedure.

Confessedly, the greatest master of history, equally great as investigator, critic, and writer, was Thucydides. And yet it has frequently and justly been remarked that his narrative has steadily lost in general importance and interest until now he is comprehensible and entertaining only for the scholar. This means that to be appreciated he must be read and considered from his own standpoint and in regard to his own times. None but the scholar can transfer himself to an epoch so remote. It would be an insoluble puzzle to the most intelligent modern reader to find in the pages of so renowned an historical work no mention of the great con-

temporary poets, architects, sculptors, or philosophers, but to have the entire artistic, philosophical, and literary movement of the time—a movement unique in the history of the world—summed up in the passing phrase that the works of men's hands seen by the Athenian were such that "the daily delight of them banishes gloom." It would be equally surprising to the same reader to learn that the speeches which constitute between a fifth part and a quarter of the whole text were never spoken by their reputed authors, but were the composition of the historian himself. These paradoxes the classical scholar can perfectly explain, but the historical scholar, and still more the reader of history, must recognize in them the immense change which has come over the character of history. The student of Thucydides as a craftsman will, however, find in him the whole of modern historical science. The idea of the permanency of his results contained in his famous phrase *κτῆμα ἐς αἰὲν* is carefully founded on four claims: the strict truth of his facts as determined either by personal observation or by the searching criticism of statements made by eye-witnesses; his theme as sufficiently important to affect all nations—whether city states or barbaric empires; the fact that his book was composed and not compiled; the persistent identity of human nature in all ages. Put in another way, these ideas are: scrupulous attention to truth; in an epoch of general history; with a unity of spirit and purpose; and with regard to the human spirit as being always the same, or substantially so.

If, then, every one of our vaunted positions was forestalled twenty-three centuries ago, what is new in the modern science of history? The answer is plain,—the application of them to new knowledge under changed conditions. History will not stay written. Every age demands a history written from its own standpoint,—with reference to its own social condition, its thought, its beliefs, and its acquisitions,—and therefore comprehensible to the men who live in it. Truth, justice, honor, the great principles of human association, have not changed, but man's apprehension of them has steadily grown clearer as his determination to live up to them has grown stronger, and as the individual has become ever more conscious of his powers, both physical and intellectual. For this reason, the seat of sovereign power is never the same in two successive states of society. At the dawn of history, man was the bond-slave of a vague but extensive kinship,—the gens or clan or tribe or city-community; his story has been one of slow and steady approach to an emancipation from the despotism of all kinship except that of the normal monogamous fam-

ily by which the human species is best propagated and without the institution of which it reverts to the level of the brute. Power has been exercised successively or intermittently by patriarchal, theocratic, military, or dynastic sanction until in these last days it is resident in the associated masses of men constituting what we call nations and is imperfectly, though imperiously, expressed by the behests of majorities. These we obey because of an instinctive conviction that with the advance of education and the spread of knowledge there has been a more or less perfect grasp of truth by an ever-increasing number of human beings, until now the majority is likely, in the long run, to decide upon any public question more correctly than the minority. The latter, when oppressed, have always by common consent the indefeasible right to turn themselves into a majority by the agitation of their principles.

Since, then, the individual and the nation interact more rapidly and completely one upon the other than ever before, the facts of their interaction become more numerous and its forms more complex, until contemporary history is apparently the most complex conceivable. If, as we generally admit, the more complex organism is the higher, and progress an advance from simplicity to complexity, this result is a very desirable one and deserves to be described with minuteness and eloquence. Mere political history, for example, will no longer suffice for a public hungering after information. The social, industrial, commercial, æsthetic, religious, and moral conditions of the common man are so determinative in our modern life that we now demand some account of them from the history of every period, in order that we may have clear notions of their genesis and development in the past for our guidance in the present. And inasmuch as they so sensibly affect our own politics, we expect the historian to explain how they affected past politics,—being loath to believe that they were as unimportant as the tenor of histories written in the past would seem to indicate. This demand is not altogether intelligent, for the complexity may be only apparent. The continuity of race-life, the persistence of its characteristics, the vigor and vitality of the “stirp,” to use Galton’s phrase, have become increasingly evident. The stream, flowing beneath the surface like a sunken rill, wells up from time to time, mingling in one place with mould and loam to moisten and invigorate a productive soil; in another, boiling between the fissures of the rock as a crystal spring to refresh the traveller; in another, losing itself amid shifting grains of obdurate minerals to create a dangerous quicksand, or, again,

soaking some bed of dying vegetation to breed miasms and engender the deceitful swamp lights. But the quality and substance of the undercurrent are identical in each case, the action of environment producing the widely different results. Of course every metaphor halts; for in the case of race-life, the same vital power or plasm is transferred, apparently without hurt, through the channel of generations temporarily dwarfed or crippled, to reappear with all its pristine strength and goodness in a later generation more favorably placed amid normal external influences. Not to make invidious mention of any single instance, every reader will recall certain well-known convict colonies established several generations ago in different parts of the world which are now thriving, wholesome societies. If this conception be true, history, as the record of a continuous race-life, not only may, but must, concern itself with enduring essentials rather than with temporary incidentals, in which case it will become with time more and more simple, as well as more and more unitary.

Another proof of how dangerous is the effort to meet the general unintelligent expectation of complex detail in historical writing will be found in the analytical study of history as composed by the great masters of the past. We are often interested though not instructed by those who in our day seek to meet this expectation, as we observe their struggles to fit present terms to bygone conditions. Their predecessors took a course directly the opposite; for when they felt an incongruity between current language and old ideas, they sought for new forms of expression, or even omitted matters only partially relevant, rather than mention them under the load of reservation necessary to prevent misunderstanding. They knew that masses of verbiage give undue prominence to the underlying idea, however much the writer may disclaim his intention to do so. It is a very significant fact of the historical record that we can in many cases actually distinguish successive states of society one from the other by examining the historian's theme and his treatment of it, studying the characteristic terms he employs for his purposes. Thucydides almost created a new language, and he mentions the chryselephantine statue of Athene only to say that it contained gold which might be useful for the expenses of warfare in case of need, the Parthenon only as having absorbed sums which would otherwise have been available for the same purpose. We are not to suppose that the historian was insensible to the beauty either of sculpture or of architecture, but we are to conclude that the wholesome and spontaneous æstheticism of Greek life was a very minor consideration when

the state was in danger, when the prestige of Athens was jeopardized, or when the historian had in mind to record a movement as far-reaching in its political influence as the Peloponnesian war. In other words we may thus estimate the proportionate value of politics and æsthetics in Athens at the time of Pericles, we may distinguish the greatness of the matter in the self-denial which kept Thucydides to a single theme, but we may not mark him down as a clod, unable to appreciate those objects of perfect beauty, the mere crumbling remnants of which move us to ecstasy. J. R. Green once said jokingly to Freeman : " You are neither religious, literary, nor social." In precisely the same way it could be said of Thucydides that he was neither religious, literary, social, nor æsthetic, if he be judged from the space given in his works to the descriptive treatment of those themes. But in no sense could it be said of him that he did not take into account their influence in political history.

This illustration is perhaps somewhat overweighted, but it will serve to accentuate a truth, that in the state whose free elements formed a society the most elaborately democratic so far known, it did not appear essential to the greatest historical critic who has ever lived that even the most striking unpolitical features of public and private life should be interwoven with his narrative. A similar conclusion might be drawn from the pages of Tacitus, or even of Gibbon and Montesquieu. The lesson of all this for us is that we must not go too far in yielding to a popular clamor, nor admit that the weight of the individual in modern life entitles his occupations and beliefs to more than a certain moderate share in the story of the organism to which he belongs. We are too apt to regard the study of institutions, of religion, of economics, and of art as being history itself, instead of taking their results as the material of history. This distinction is a very nice one, and difficult to draw in practice. But surely it can be done by those who are equipped for the task of writing real history. Such authors will keep the emphasis on the state and on the organs by which it nourishes and prolongs its life; on its instruments of self-protection and the use made of them; on the features of its identity and the inter-relation of its personality with individual men and with other states; on its conduct in peace and war and the principles which guide it; or in more technical phrase on government and administration, on diplomacy and international relations. In biography we are, as is entirely right, chiefly concerned with the personality of the man and his relations with other men; we are but incidentally concerned with his daily food,

his seasonable clothing, his medicines, his bodily characteristics, or the habits which build up his frame; we are somewhat more concerned with his beliefs, his education, his instincts, but of these we judge by his conduct more than by his opportunities or by his statements. While all analogy between the organic life of the state and the organic life of man is highly dangerous, yet in this one respect we may note that, as in the case of the man behavior is the essential thing, so the conduct of the state, which expresses the resultant life of those who compose it, is the essential matter of history.

This brings us to a thought which must be emphasized in the interest of historical studies in America, the conviction that the use of complex materials in history as now written and the consequent discursiveness of its style, both resulting so often in length, dullness, and obscurity, are in no sense due to the prevalence of democracy as the governmental form of civilized nations. This opinion has been so often reiterated that it has come to be extensively admitted as a fact. It is said that literature has been sacrificed on the altar of science, that the imagination has been eclipsed by facts, and that interest has been immolated before the Moloch of details. Instances like that of the poet Heine have been potent in the support of this conclusion. Beginning as the fierce protagonist of freedom in religion and politics, he continued long in the career of a radical agitator. But he came to believe at last that democracy must necessarily abandon beauty for utility, the poetry of life for material comfort, and must quench all artistic aspiration in the interest of equality and fraternity. In the end, therefore, he apostatized, burned his polemic verses, tore down the shrines he had erected to his revolutionary divinities, parted from Pantheism and his Pagan gods alike, and then in the interest of personality, without which there can be no human will and consequently no poetry, made his peace with the Almighty, resigned himself, and died.

But we venture to think that Heine's temporary malady was essentially European, and not cosmopolitan. The thought of his time, as of the present day among the scholars of the continent, displays an intense weariness of the past, a yearning to be rid of the old failures and to try new experiments. Quite the contrary is characteristic of America, which, though neither optimistic nor pessimistic, is essentially conservative and melioristic. The democracy of Europe is young, radical, and fierce, that of English America, though determined, has the modesty of long experience. The two are antipodal, and the evidence of this is conclusive

wherever they are brought into juxtaposition, as they are so constantly on our own shores. Radical democracy in any degree will of course level down and not up, and so destroy all greatness both in the making and in the writing of history. No tranquillity can be found by those who possess power either in its abandonment as an act of self-abnegation or in its compulsory surrender to sheer numbers. The experiment has often been tried and found a failure. Judging human nature from what it has always been, such a dead level of mediocrity as the radical democrat yearns for will be just as impossible in the future as would be, let us say, that abolition of all authority, concerning which anarchists vapor and dream. There will always be rulers and ruled at least, and that relation in itself promises a sufficient inequality for the literary element in true history. Even if eminence go no further than the temporary tossings of the sea waves, which fall back to their level when the storm is over and gone, may we not remember that nothing has more constantly or permanently aroused the human imagination than the great plain of the ocean? Viewed from the standpoint either of the individual atoms or of the great mass itself, an orderly modern democracy can now, as it has done before, furnish abundant room for the play of talent, if it exists, either in the practical statesmanship of its own age, or in the investigation of the states and statesmen of other ages.

It must be confessed that on the whole the imaginative literature of the United States, like its creative art, has not been either very abundant or strikingly original. But the American people have been otherwise engaged than in enjoying lettered ease. They have been prolific in discoveries by natural science and in inventions, successful in the management of their external and internal affairs, and at the same time have worked out reforms of the first magnitude in evils which were their birth portion. When the ability which has hitherto been concerned with material things, in making homes, establishing fortunes, securing educational facilities and creating a well-ordered society, when this power and zeal are turned toward the things of the spirit, as with the advance of time they must be, then if we fail we may lament our barrenness; but until then we have faith in Providence and dare to be hopeful. In one department of literature, moreover, and that the highest form of prose composition, we have already been eminently successful: to wit, in the writing of history. This was because there were appreciative readers; a fact due to what would *a priori* be least expected from a democracy, the sentimental fondness of the masses for great

men and great deeds, and a desire to be acquainted with details concerning both. Precisely because of the complete civil and political equality which exists among us we have dared to develop aristocracy in governmental forms, to emphasize without danger to our institutions, political, social, intellectual, and even moneyed inequality, to become a nation of passionate hero-worshippers. Incidentally it may be remarked that although in all this there may have been no direct danger to our institutions there has been some menace to our morality. We have set such a premium on energy, merely as energy, that we too often condone its use of immoral means. But our main consideration is after all strengthened by this very consideration, namely, that our democracy, as far as it has gone, has done its share in the world's writing of history, and that it has furnished, as it probably will continue to furnish, most abundant material of every variety in the making of history.

Nothing is so much needed in a headstrong, self-reliant, and self-conscious people like ourselves as to explain and emphasize the proper dimensions of our national history, and to understand our proportionate share in general history. Viewed from one standpoint we are very young, our story is very short and our importance in the great world-drama is very recent. To the continental European, the man of the masses, we are an overgrown, childish, and turbulent land, mainly populated by unintelligent emigrants from Ireland, Germany, and Italy, who are in part criminals, in part malcontents, and in part adventurers: we are devoid of historic sense, as we are without historic continuity; entirely absorbed in money getting, utterly material in our politics, and successful only because our country has a fertile soil and is rich in minerals, besides being so enormous that as yet we not only have not solved but are entirely unfamiliar with any of the terrible social problems arising from overgrown or congested population. This opinion has been carefully created in many lands by the public press, is more or less fostered even in universities, and is not entirely absent in the intelligent and ruling classes. It exists because there is a reason for it. We are, in fact, constantly pleading both our youth and our isolation for all sorts of preposterous experiments in finance, in society, and in politics, and we are taken at our word. It is the fashionable and successful jargon of the stump-speaker to decry the experience of other worlds and other times as having no value for us. We are nearly swamped in certain great cities by the sludge thrown upon our shores from the governments of Europe, in the shape of the shiftless, stupid, and, too often, crim-

inal elements of their populations, who are either fugitives from justice, or else are encouraged by the authorities of the countries that produced them to go into exile as the simplest means of rid-dance. Publicity is essential to purity in a democratic government, and these characteristics of our life are much bruited, while the currents of agitation and sanitation set in motion to counteract the evils pass unnoticed beneath the surface.

But there is also a scholarly as well as a popular view of American history from the European standpoint, which regards it as proportionately short and narrow. As it is often expressed in Germany, France, and England, though not frequently published in serious works, we are a part of England switched off. The siding is not long and does not bid fair to be lengthened; or, to change the metaphor, we illustrate what biologists call arrested development. Starting with the society, religion, and politics of eighteenth-century England, we adapted her constitution by slight changes to state democracy and to a national federal system—there, according to this view, we stopped: our land-laws and methods of administration, urban and rural, are as we took them, our faiths have been preserved with ultra-conservatism, our language is eighteenth-century English, our literature is a faint, distorted reflection of successive stages in English literary development; our art and dress are borrowed from France, our science and educational systems are appropriated from Germany, but not assimilated. This view, in short, charges us with having remained colonial, if not parochial. It is held by them that taunt us with not belonging to the family of nations. We have, as they think, buried our human talent, struggling only to retain what we have, or to get what we can without risk; our concerns are entirely with ourselves, with our own comfort and luxury, with our own peace of mind and ease of conscience. We have, they assert, no external relations as a nation, because we have no high principle based on experience which we care to defend. Because we refuse to take the heavy burden on our shoulders of costly armaments for preserving and spreading civilization, we can have little pride in our own advance, little faith in the superiority of our living. Our politics are purely commercial, our public interests those of tradesmen, our policy to borrow in gold and pay in silver at an arbitrary valuation. We are conservative in religion, because it is comfortable to be so; we are not inquisitive doubters with sore and quickened consciences, because we are afraid to face the consequences of investigation. In short, we are like the Sidonians, dwelling careless, quiet, and secure as regards the great moral and intellec-

tual struggles of the world at large. That there is some truth in this view no serious American, who has held up the mirror to his land and age, can deny.

In all probability it will be admitted by the well-informed and studious among us that, owing to the circumstances of our origin, we have been disposed in controversy to lay too much stress on theory and too little on experience. We were hard-pressed when we forswore allegiance to the English Parliament but admitted fealty to the English crown, when we abandoned the position of basing our liberties on charter grants and appealed to our rights as Englishmen, when we substituted for the cry of "no representation, no taxation," that of "no representation, no legislation," when we based the legitimacy of revolutionary state conventions upon the authorization of an irregular continental congress, and when finally we appealed to the sympathy of the world and the judgment of the God of battles. The French alliance and our temporary bitterness toward the motherland made us fond of France as of a generous sympathetic ally, but it may later have made us too familiar with the wire-drawn speculations of the eighteenth century and we were probably too receptive to the radicalism of the French Revolution when we saw how England stubbornly repelled even the constructive and righteous elements in that movement. Our historical teachers may have sat too long at the feet of German Gamaliels, imbibing too much dangerous doctrine concerning the sanctity of authority as established; as a people we certainly have come to emphasize unduly the organic character of government, to overestimate the systematic nature of political science, political economy, and jurisprudence, and as a consequence to consider the state as an organism existing only to secure purely economic interests. It seems, too, that public opinion often substitutes legality for morality and accepts expediency in place of rectitude. Like Achan, we have from motives of selfishness concealed the spoils of the Philistines in the tents of Judah, involving the children in the retribution visited on the fathers. It is no excuse to plead that as a nation we are in this respect but one among many sinners, that it is human for the administrator to lay hold on the easy theories of so-called political science, for a struggling people to admire the sounding phrases of state-craft: the lessons of history are recondite and the commandments of political experience are hard.

Whatever truth may lie in the indictments brought against us ought to be taken to heart, not in the spirit of sensitiveness, but in one of earnest purpose to weigh the possibilities of reform for

our own and for righteousness' sake. We can well afford to be indifferent to allegations either captious or based on ignorance, and certain charges may be brushed away without ceremony. We are not isolated. The ocean is now less of a barrier at the worst seasons of the year than some of our great rivers were in mid-winter a century ago; we are in quicker, easier communication with Europe than the nations of that continent were with each other three generations since. We ourselves make use of the means of intercourse and travel to a degree that gives uneasiness to American chauvinists, while others come to us, not in proportion as we go to them, but at least in sufficient numbers to awaken interest and to spread abroad such fame as we have beyond the seas. Nor can we justly be charged with unreceptiveness. We are much troubled with a conceit which sometimes makes us appear averse to using foreign ideas, but we have none of that hurt and fiery national pride or of that stolid self-satisfaction which embitter the relations of European nations to each other. At heart our motto is: "Get the Best," and, instead of feeling ashamed of the charge of eclecticism, there is nothing of which we should be prouder than of the desire to get and keep anything good for us, no difference what its origin. Mixed races and mixed civilizations have been the most persistent in the history of man. It is a great mistake to suppose that there can be nothing American except it originate from Anglo-Saxon sources on the soil of the United States. There are men on every part of the globe and ideas in every land that are American in the high sense which we should like to attach to that word. This fact has been fairly well understood, for our history has not been one of origins, but exactly the contrary. No movement with the sententious but false cry of America for the Americans has ever been successful among us. Wise as the forefathers were to generalize from experience, the sons have erected with equal wisdom on their foundation a proud superstructure built of materials more stubborn and heterogeneous than any the founders had to handle, and have devised for the new nation a plan so generous and commodious that it is not likely to be carried to completion for ages to come. To say that we are unwilling to suffer for ideas and indifferent as to the spread of our civilization is amusing. The maps of 1756, when compared with those of 1895, will show what proportion of the earth's surface we have pre-empted for our civilization in something more than a century and a quarter, and it can be asserted without fear of contradiction that more men of Anglo-Saxon blood have perished in battle for a principle in the single county of Spottsylvania, in Virginia, than England

has lost up to this moment in all the conflicts of her foreign wars.

What, therefore, the historic movement of our democracy may be thought to lack in duration finds ample compensation in intensity. But we must go still further and declare the common admission that it lacks in duration to be both cowardly and dangerous. The civilization of the United States is not an early-ripe one, verging to decay before reaching normal maturity. We are Europeans of ancient stock, and a change of skies did not involve a new physical birth for our society. Doubtless, environment modified our development, but the well-ordered, serious life which we brought with us from England, Scotland, Ireland, Holland, Germany, and France we have preserved and developed, at least as well as those who stayed at home. But we have done far more. Having created a set of distinctively American institutions, we have enlarged and strengthened them for the purposes of millions to whom they were originally foreign, and have already secured for constitutional government a longer life and greater comprehensiveness than it has had in any other country except England. The dreadful system of African slavery which came with us from the Europe of a mercenary and mercantile age, we have painfully destroyed, although we wrestle still with the race problems entailed upon us by its creation and abolition. We have settled at great cost of life and money one of the fundamental questions which the founders left open,—that of extreme states' rights. We have ploughed under and assimilated successive deposits of foreign immigrations, and have rendered them as beneficent as those made on Egypt's soil by the inundations of the Nile, feeling ourselves the stronger for their fertility and strength. In this progress, we have not been like a mariner afloat with a compass; we have, rather, been like the explorer of the wilderness, who, while he presses forward, is ever turning to observe the landmarks behind him in order to direct his course by fixing a line from which he must not deviate. To this, and to this alone, we owe the measure of success we have enjoyed. We have been historic in a double sense,—not merely by the long duration of our colonial and separate existence, but, in spite of assertions to the contrary, by the careful attention we have given to the past. The most numerous and important of our institutions, being based on experience, have endured, the few and unessential ones which were founded in theory have fallen into disuse.

It seems to be the opinion of the keenest observers beyond the Atlantic that the old world of to-day is weary of the past.

The movements of the hour in Europe claim for themselves independence, long-used models are rejected, and the modern age sets up its own ideals. Some of those most thoroughly versed in history — Grimm, the great art-historian, for example — confess their disappointment at the emptiness of historical study, demanding both comfort and guidance, not from the past but from the present, finding grounds for hope only in the possibilities of the future. And, what is even more instructive, the public of these critics displays no amazement. It was the stock criticism of European newspapers during the Chicago exposition that its buildings and general effect were neither original nor modern. The architecture, they confessed, was beautiful, and the arrangement admirable, but the models were classical, the style European, the aim historic. This they declared was disappointing, — the close of the nineteenth century in the most modern of all countries should have produced something not hitherto seen, should have used steel construction boldly and without the concealment of stucco, and it should have devised suitable architectural forms of beauty to display the American spirit, if such a thing there be. It was thought that in this respect our efforts compared unfavorably with those made in the previous world's fair at Paris. The European yearning for modernity and futurity hinted at by these illustrations could be further traced in the art and literature of the "decadence," in the daring socialistic legislation of France and Germany, and in many other directions. This tendency from experience towards theory, from adaptation towards experiment, from progress on traditional lines to advance on untried paths, is in no sense characteristic of America, as yet. The easy circulation of ideas throughout the globe may bring it hither, but if it comes or when it comes, and a conservative democracy guiding itself by the lights of history is transmuted into a radical ochlocracy moving by impulse or steering by wreckers' beacons, then, as it takes no prophetic gift to foretell, we shall have anarchy and ruin.

History, we may rest assured, is none the less history because it is scientific or democratic. But, in an age that is both, the character of it will be of necessity somewhat different from what it was in the days which were imaginative and aristocratic or absolutist. If this be admitted, the final question naturally arises, — whether it will continue to be literary in the old or in any sense. Must the bark of literary history be moored to shores from which the waters are receding and, sinking into the ooze, lie forgotten for ages, until disinterred like a Viking ship and preserved as an archæological curiosity; or may it follow the channel

of human life into the new lands whither the stream winds its course? To this question, the answer must be both theoretical and historical. Theoretically considered, the reply will be affirmative; for, after twenty-four centuries, we have no reason to question the validity of the Greek historian's opinion that human nature will remain identical (or nearly so) with what it has always been. There will be, we may suppose, the two sorts of historical writing known in his time,—compilation and composition. It does not seem, after examining, contrasting, and comparing the Athenian with the American democracy, as if the proportion of compilers to authors were any greater now than then, the former useful class being in both places overwhelmingly in the majority. The highest form of literary, as it is of historical, criticism is to separate the permanent from the transitory in its own age. Compared with that, the appreciation of what has stood the test of time is child's play, however difficult the adequate and judicious appropriation of the past may be. Investigation, though absolutely essential, resembles the work of the quarryman whose blocks of stone are as enduring as the inert hills, and exactly for the same reason. But the use of the blocks by the artist is quite another matter. To imagine a plan, to inspire it with genius, to adapt the means to the end, to compel unity and harmony,—this is the work of the maker, the composer, the poet. No age has been without such creators, and although, like the stars, they differ one from another in glory, yet we may be sure that in our time there are at least minor historians in the best sense and luminaries of the first magnitude also, if only our critical judgment can distinguish them.

Even if we were to admit for the sake of discussion, as we should be unwilling to admit for any other reason, that the materials of history as once written, kings, courts, and battles, were more interesting in themselves than presidents, parliaments, and social conditions, yet still the most modest truth is not destitute of interest, especially when it is the truth about men. It is this which Cervantes thought made all history sacred, truth in some degree being essential to it, *y donde está la verdad, está Dios en quanto á verdad*. We are accustomed to say and with good reason that the history of art, pure or applied, is the truest of all histories. The meanest potsherd, like the greatest statue, was made to satisfy a want; the objects of daily life throughout the ages were made to gratify natural wholesome desire; they have no concealed motive in them and no pretence to be what they are not; they express sincerely the spirit of their time. So likewise the democratic man

is moved by the emotions he feels, and his character is expressed in the institutions he devises in order to secure what he longs for. The individual may be deceitful and what he writes may be the curtain behind which he manœuvres: but what he does and the record he makes in doing it are as artless as the utensil he designs and the ornamentation he puts upon it. Moreover, in the modern democracy, the individual of every rank is an insider. In ancient and mediæval democracies the laborer was either a slave or a powerless serf. When in the majority, he could only influence affairs indirectly or by revolution: to-day he has at hand every instrument known to those who work with their heads or with their capital; and he wields one which they have not,—the force of numbers. Theoretically then the truth should be easier to discern and more self-evident in our time than ever before. If the literary artist be at hand, his task of investigation should be easier than that of his predecessors and his materials should be more reliable than ever; the product of his genius ought, consequently, to be more splendid.

There is one other point which deserves attention in connection with these theoretical considerations, and that is the attitude of the reader. Without sympathetic and careful readers there can be no artistic history, exactly as there can be no poetry, no sculpture, no painting without an appreciative and discriminating public. Does such a public exist for the historian? That the readers of history are numerous will not be denied, if we may judge from the publishers' announcements and from the records of our libraries. The histories of our day which the public esteems pass through many editions and are sold at prices which books of no other class can command. But of the intellectual quality among these readers it is not so easy to speak with confidence. On the one hand it is true that our most careful workers, men like Bancroft or Parkman or Alexander Johnston, or those of the living whose names will occur to every reader, seem to create an audience for themselves without difficulty. But it is also true, on the other hand, that this may be due to that mere desire for information which is not one of the best signs of the times. Whether readers rise from perusing the best products of the day with any definite conception of the historian's spirit and purpose is another question.

The systematic teaching of history in our schools and colleges is still far to seek. The larger universities have an imposing array of historical chairs, but they do not demand as a condition of entrance to their lecture rooms a thorough knowledge of general history. For the most part it is American history which, in deference to patriotic but unintelligent public opinion, is set as the subject of

preliminary work ; although in a few cases English history is admitted as a substitute. In other words, the logical process of teaching is exactly reversed, and our youth begin with a highly specialized subject of historical study before they have laid the foundation of general liberal knowledge. The educated class being thus poorly equipped at the very outset by the fault of our system, a bias toward some specialty easily prejudices the immature judgment as to other portions of history and emphasizes the value of materials with regard to themselves and to the particular structure into which they enter. The historical reviewers of our great journals are, with a few fine exceptions, examples of how specialties overshadow the genuine system of which they are a part. In order to display their own erudition the critics must belittle that of the writer, and so attention is directed not to him nor to the complete product of his mind, but to his materials, his canvas, his colors, his brushes or what not, anything but the picture he has made. The burden of the reviewer's instruction generally is that the reader is not to tolerate preaching or mere writing, but that he must scrutinize the facts and the authority on which assertions are made. Of the requirement of accuracy there can be no complaint : but the correlation and presentation of the facts cannot be done by mere arrangement or without the very discursiveness which is stigmatized as ornament, style, preaching, or fine writing ; and it is in this correlation and explanation of the causal relation that the highest capacity of the true historian is displayed. May we not hope that, in time, the paramount importance of this truth will be recognized by intelligent readers, and that they will be on the lookout not for new information solely nor for erudite reference to archives, rare books and manuscript authorities alone, but for the method and spirit which constitute the intellectual personality of the writer, in order to judge not only of his industry but of his spiritual dimensions ? Without this there can be no historical literature and none of that leadership in historical opinion, the absence of which renders the whole science vague and nugatory. Great minds only can construct systems, and the knowledge which is unrelated to philosophy has little value, if indeed it be anything more than curious information.

Turning from speculation to examine historically what are the chances in America for history that shall be alike scientific and artistic, the prospect is certainly not discouraging, unless the retrospect be entirely misleading. Since the earliest settlement of the country, the Europeans who chose it for their home have been deeply impressed with the significance of the enterprise in

which they were engaged, and in consequence have been determined that a permanent record of their experiences should be kept. In the seventeenth century we had among the cavaliers that boastful and loquacious travel-writer and hero-worshipper, Captain John Smith, whose pictures and pages emphasize the importance of small beginnings, especially when guided by so truly great a man as himself. We have his quaint countertype among the Puritans in gossiping, rhyming Edward Johnson, to whom plain people were the substance of history. And in that century, too, we had the grave and trustworthy governors, Bradford and Winthrop, who, with equal piety and grace, delineated the two settlements with which they were respectively concerned as links in the divine plan, as correlated with the moral order of the universe. The next hundred years gave us five historical writers of note: for New England, Cotton Mather, the monument of erudition and credulity, Thomas Prince, the scholarly collector and annalist, and Thomas Hutchinson, the first philosophic American historian; for the South, Robert Beverley, geographer and historian of Virginia, with William Stith, the laborious and accurate compiler of her early records. The century of our independence is often designated the classic era of our historical writing; and, indeed, it would be difficult for any country in any age to display a galaxy of names more brilliant than that which is composed of Gordon, Marshall, Irving, Bancroft, Hildreth, Prescott, Motley, and Parkman. So splendid has been their achievement in various lines of work that a sense of hopelessness frequently manifests itself in the present and rising generation, a feeling that the nation must have exhausted itself, at least temporarily, in producing such learning and industry, and that an interval of incubation must elapse before such vigor can be shown again in the same direction.

This was, as may be imagined, far from being the sentiment of the numerous and enthusiastic muster of historical students which selected an editorial board to found this review. It is not the opinion of the liberal guarantors who have come to its financial support, nor of the subscribers whose assistance shows warm approval of its plan. For no one of these classes have either the editors or the writer a mandate to speak. Any attempt to foreshadow the character and sphere of a publication, the prospect of which seems already to have awakened much interest, must be purely personal, and marked by the diffidence of irresponsibility. But it appears as if *THE AMERICAN HISTORICAL REVIEW* owed its existence to certain plain facts, and that its character must depend

upon certain self-evident truths. In the first place, there is no check on the course of historical study in the United States: on the contrary, the volume becomes daily greater. In the second place, there is no decrease in the number of historical writers. Confined no longer, as in a former epoch, to the elegant, wealthy, and studious society of Federalist New England, they are now found in every district of the land, and among men of every shade of political and religious opinion. In the third place the reading public is daily enlarging, and its intelligence, as we trust, is proportionately increasing. These phenomena are probably both cause and effect with regard one to the other; but, taken as a whole, they create a grave responsibility, which earnest and patriotic men have long felt should be recognized and assumed by somebody. This is the responsibility for co-ordination and intelligent criticism in historical work. The strength of this feeling has long been noticeable; and when at last, in several centres of learning simultaneously, it became too strong for repression, the movement to give it outlet and direction was virtually spontaneous among all historical workers. The unity of purpose and the disinterestedness displayed were unique in the history of similar movements, so far as the United States are concerned. The universities laid aside their rivalries, scholars emerged from their closets, representatives of cities and districts contending for distinction as literary hearthstones banished every jealousy, there was a singleness of hearty feeling, and a sturdy good-will to overcome all obstacles.

This review, therefore, must, by the auspices under which it begins, display the largest catholicity possible, and an impartiality willing always to hear the other side. It can in no sense be an organ of any school, locality, or clique. Controversial it certainly must be, but we trust always within the limits of courtesy. The mission of critic, to which reference has been made, implies much. There is something in the very word "criticism" which in established usage indicates blame; and we too often use it as synonymous with sarcasm and depreciation. But among the countless advances made by the human spirit none is greater than the substitution of the constructive for the destructive notion in the highest and most advanced criticism. It is in this direction that we hope the new periodical will move. Its primary object is indicated by its name of Review. No doubt it must and should print articles embodying the results of investigation and monographs of importance; but it ought chiefly to be a critical review, fearless to denounce a bad or superficial book which solicits public favor, equally courageous to sustain one which presents unpopular truth,

and sufficiently learned to give reasons for its opinions. Incidentally, too, the amount of notice should as far as possible be indicative of the relative values of the volumes named. Finally, it must assist historical scholars by furnishing materials that could not otherwise be published, and by keeping its professional readers abreast with the latest news in the field which most interests them. Believing that our democracy with its growing numbers, wealth, and influence will nevertheless remain historically minded and therefore afford proportionate support to the best historical work, we trust that all the elements it embraces may find representation and encouragement in these pages. The profounder our study of ourselves, the stronger will grow our conviction of the organic relation between our own history and that of the world. Every division of the field of general history from the earliest to the latest times should be represented here as it is among American investigators. At the same time the orientalists and the classicists, being compelled to use philology, archæology, and the other disciplines kindred to history, as the chief instruments of their work, have each their own particular and special periodicals: so also have the students of political economy, political science, and jurisprudence; we can have no intention to appropriate the fields already pre-empted by their able reviews. Consequently, therefore, in the selection of material for our readers, while we shall welcome contributions in ancient history, oriental or classical, we must emphasize the importance of mediæval, modern, and contemporaneous history, not excluding a fair consideration for uncontroversial ecclesiastical investigation, and using all these terms in a sense so broad as to put no hampering limitation upon them, remaining ever hospitable to themes in the line of biography or historical philosophy, and especially to discussions of method and system in historical science. The disciplines concerned with humanity claim as an advantage over those concerned with the external world that they have no hard and fast boundaries, and that they afford free play to the discursive faculties. We must frankly confess that expediency, timeliness, and similar considerations will necessarily govern those who manage an historical journal like this one, but as far as the present writer has understood the deliberations of his colleagues, their general purpose is indicated, though roughly, in the sketch he has given of their aims during the time they are intrusted with the charge of *THE AMERICAN HISTORICAL REVIEW*. Its ability to sustain its interest, to secure the strongest contributors, to preserve its independence, to furnish valuable material, and to do the best work generally for the cause to which it is devoted

will now depend on the kindly consideration and material support of the large public to which it appeals ; for it is already assured of the hearty co-operation of scholars and specialists. Whatever measure of money is intrusted to it will be entirely expended in the returns made to the readers. The editors and guarantors feel themselves amply rewarded by their opportunity to serve a great cause.

WILLIAM M. SLOANE.